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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6676
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2017
TAGS: MOPS ASEC PINS PHUM PGOV PREL EPET UG CG
SUBJECT: CONGOLESE MILITARY RELEASES FOUR UGANDAN SOLDIERS
HELD IN ITURI

REF: KAMPALA 1272

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Talks between Congolese and Ugandan military
representatives led to the release August 6 of four Ugandan
People's Defense Force (UPDF) soldiers who had been held by
the Congolese military (FARDC) in Ituri District since July
¶29. The meeting also led to an agreement to establish
conflict-resolution mechanisms that will help avoid clashes
between the two sides, such as the one August 3 that killed
one civilian and one Congolese soldier. Border tensions will
likely persist in the area due to poorly-defined boundaries,
a history of arms trafficking, and the potential for future
oil exploitation. End summary.

¶2. (U) The FARDC on August 6 released four UPDF soldiers it
had been holding since July 29 in Ituri District in
northwestern DRC. According to MONUC and Congolese officials
in Bunia, the FARDC marine unit around Similiki arrested the
four after they reportedly crossed into DRC territorial
waters. According to the FARDC, the Ugandan soldiers did not
identify themselves although they were armed and wearing
Ugandan military uniforms. They were subsequently taken to
Bunia for further questioning.

¶3. (SBU) The talks that secured the soldiers' release were
established following a second -- and presumably unrelated --
incident on Lake Albert August 3 when Congolese and Ugandan
soldiers fired on each other, killing one Congolese soldier
and one civilian. According to information reported reftel,
Congolese armed patrol boats attacked a Heritage Oil
exploration crew boat, which was carrying out a seismic
survey on Lake Albert. Carl Nefdt, a British national working
with Heritage, was killed in the firefight.

¶4. (C) Congolese military officials, however, offer a
different explanation for the attack. According to FARDC
Ituri Operations Commander General Andre Kinkela, two
Heritage Oil boats with armed personnel "overtook" a fishery
camp in Rukwanzi in Lake Albert in the Similiki area,
entering DRC territorial waters. Authorities in Rukwanzi
informed the local FARDC camp, which dispatched its own boats
to the area. Kinkela said the Heritage personnel called for
"reinforcement" as the FARDC boats approached. Two UPDF armed
vessels arrived, reportedly from nearby Ntoroko, and
exchanged fire with the FARDC crew.

¶5. (SBU) Following the two incidents, Kinkela headed a
50-member Congolese delegation to Rukwanzi August 6 to meet
with Ugandan counterparts, including UPDF General Hudson
Mukasa. In addition to the release of the four UPDF soldiers,
the two sides agreed to set up conflict resolution mechanisms

to avoid future incidents. Marine units of both countries are to establish liaison branches tasked with sharing information on planned patrols along Lake Albert. Both also agreed to hold future meetings on cross-border cooperation between military and civilian authorities of both countries.

¶6. (C) Comment: The border between the DRC and Uganda on and around Lake Albert is ill-defined and has always been porous. Congolese officials are particularly sensitive regarding territorial integrity, and with the area itself having long been a transit point for illegal weapons shipments to Ituri militias from Uganda and elsewhere, they are especially cautious in the region. Oil exploration in the lake may heighten tensions, as the poorly marked borders are an invitation to confusion as to where such activity can take place and who will ultimately profit from it. The Congolese belief that UPDF forces also routinely cross the border, intentionally or not, further adds to the problem. End comment.
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